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16 June 1986

Talking Points for DDI Appearance Before HPSCI

South Korea

President Chun continues to display apparent flexibility on the constitutional reform question. He is no longer resisting demands to amend the constitution before his term ends in early 1988 and is trying to keep out front on the issue. The government hopes the current special National Assembly session that opened on 5 June and runs until 24 June will result in the establishment of an ad hoc interparty committee on constitutional reform.

- [] a presidential commission on constitutional reform is preparing a proposal for a parliamentary system, which Chun apparently prefers.

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- The schedule meets a longstanding opposition demand for a concrete political timetable. As a result, opposition leaders now risk being blamed for impeding political development if they refuse to participate in the ad hoc committee. []

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The government's efforts to reach an early resolution of the constitutional issue has forced the New Korea Democratic Party to redesign its strategy.

- Sensitive to growing public criticism of the party's seeming inflexibility, Kim Young Sam and NKDP President Lee Min Woo now support party participation in the committee. Although NKDP leaders are still backing direct presidential elections--the party's official position--we believe many would be willing to compromise if they believed a new government could be elected fairly.

- [] moderate party leaders are prepared to modify their call for amnesty for an alleged 1500 jailed dissidents as a precondition for forming the committee. The government's announcement last week that about 150 jailed protesters may soon be freed, followed by more next month, and negative public reaction to the increasing violence and anti-US rhetoric of more extreme dissidents have already undercut the NKDP's amnesty demand.

- Moreover, opposition leaders recognize that continuing refusal to negotiate could give President Chun grounds for disbanding the Assembly and excluding the NKDP from new parliamentary elections. []

Kim Young Sam's efforts to direct a more flexible opposition strategy has brought relations between Kim and dissident leader Kim Dae Jung to near the breaking point. Kim Dae Jung remains adamant that only a presidential system with direct popular elections is acceptable.

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Chun
Apr 30 - we
can change left
before he left 88.

Comm. was
estab. - reports
out soon.
(summed)

just released
from pol bars
in Feb 88
commands
largest
faction

Press has
been
more
responsive

Let's
Pres Party
about 2 Kim
Even suggesting
that they should
make new leaders
2nd
largest
NKDP
faction

hard line

Radical fringe elements have also complicated the opposition's efforts to organize a united front on the constitutional reform issue.

- The opposition is concerned about the public backlash caused by its hesitance to condemn violent antigovernment and anti-US protests, but NKDP leaders are also worried about alienating dissident students and workers.
- Although some radical student leaders now consider the anti-American campaign a mistake, attacks on US-related facilities by splinter groups continue, including the brief takeover of the US consulate in Pusan last month and an attempted raid on the Embassy in Seoul on 8 June.

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It remains to be seen whether President Chun can balance apparent flexibility toward the political opposition with stiff measures aimed at neutralizing radical elements.

- Several ruling party moderates have told Embassy officials they believe there is only a small chance the ruling Democratic Justice Party will offer a conciliatory proposal for constitutional reform.

The Chun government could face a strong public backlash if its proposal--as many critics anticipate--is obviously tailored to enable Chun or his close associates to monopolize power.

The ruling camp will also open itself to renewed criticism if it attempts to restrict public constitutional debate after acknowledging the popular desire for reform.

President Chun faces a bumpy road ahead, and he may feel impelled to move aggressively if the opposition appears to be getting the upper hand in the public constitutional debate or if parliamentary negotiations collapse.

- If the government's draft amendment falls far short of popular expectations, pressure from Kim Dae Jung would almost certainly force Kim Young Sam and other leaders to break off talks and resume the party's street campaign for direct elections.

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*Suspicion
Just
to play
Chun &
his ass
story
in pond.*

*If Assembly
closes 24 without
action
Chun
will
push
his
own
solution*

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South Korea: Background on Parliamentary System

The presidential commission on constitutional reform and the ruling Democratic Justice Party are likely to recommend replacing the present centralized executive system with a "dual executive"--or parliamentary--system, in which a prime minister elected by and responsible to the National Assembly would act as head of government, sharing power with a president acting as head of state.

- Both groups claim to be studying variations of the parliamentary system, but we have no information on their thinking even on such key issues as the division of authority between president and prime minister, how the prime minister would be nominated and elected, or procedures for electing the president and the National Assembly.

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South Korea adopted a parliamentary system following the collapse of the Syngman Rhee government in 1960. That system, which lasted until Park Chung Hee's coup in 1961, sharply curtailed the president's powers, reducing him to little more than a figurehead. Seats in the National Assembly were filled by popularly elected representatives, each representing a separate district.

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It is unlikely, in our view, that the ruling camp proposal will go as far in limiting presidential powers. It is also unlikely that it will replace the present indirect presidential elections with direct elections or substitute a system of single-seat legislative districts for the present system, which combines two-seat legislative districts with the assignment of one-third of the seats on a nonelective basis.

- Currently the party winning the most elected seats is allocated an additional 61 appointive seats, while the other major parties share another 31 appointive seats.
- The present system has allowed the government to easily maintain a near ironclad 55-percent majority in the National Assembly based on 35-percent of the popular vote.

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